

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-02 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----013289 252223Z /61

R 251725Z JAN 78
FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4484
INFO AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE
AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
AMEMBASSY OSLO
AMEMBASSY ROME
AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BRUSSELS 01523

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-3
TAGS: PINT, IT, BE, PEPR
SUBJECT: ITALIAN SITUATION

REF: A) STATE 15066, B) BRUSSELS 1401

1. WE HAVE REPORTED IN FULL (REF B) FOREIGN MINISTER SIMONET'S REPLY TO BELGIAN COMMUNIST PARTY LEADER'S QUESTION IN PARLIAMENT CONCERNING DEPARTMENT'S STATEMENT ON ITALIAN SITUATION. IN PRESENTING OFFICIAL BELGIAN POSITION, SIMONET SAID THAT IT WAS NOT INTENTION OF BELGIAN GOVERNMENT TO MAKE SLIGHTEST PUBLIC JUDGMENT ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE POLITICAL LIFE IN A DEMOCRATIC COUNTRY AND THAT GOB DOES NOT PLAN TO TAKE ANY POSITION. HE SAID THAT GOB HAD TAKEN NOTE OF THE OPINION VOICED BY USG AND THAT IT CONCERNED A WASHINGTON POSITION ON WHICH THE GOB DOES NOT INTEND TO MAKE A COMMENT. HE ADDED THAT TO MOVE AWAY FROM THIS ATTITUDE OF STRICT ABSTENTION WOULD CONSTITUTE A FORM OF INTERFERENCE WHICH CORRESPONDS NEITHER TO BELGIAN TRADITION NOR TO ITS

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RESPONSIBILITIES IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS.

2. IN OUR VIEW, SIMONET'S REPLY ACCURATELY REFLECTS OFFICIAL BELGIAN ATTITUDES TOWARD ITALIAN PROBLEM, AND NOTABLY THE GOB'S VERY STRONG PREFERENCE FOR NOT TAKING ANY POSITION AT ALL. ITS PUBLIC POSITION IS, IN EFFECT, NOT TO HAVE ONE.

3. PURSUANT TO DEPARTMENT'S INSTRUCTIONS, WE HAVE NOT APPROACHED BELGIANS ON POSSIBLE FOLLOW-UP TO DEPARTMENT'S STATEMENT. IN DISCUSSING SIMONET'S REPLY, HOWEVER, ONE HIGH-LEVEL MFA OFFICIAL SAID THAT THE BRIEFING MATERIAL GIVEN TO SIMONET FOR HIS REPLY INCLUDED A REMARK TO THE EFFECT THAT THE GOB PREFERRED VERBAL "INTERVENTIONS" SUCH AS DEPARTMENT'S TO THE TYPE THAT HAVE BEEN USED IN EASTERN EUROPE. SIMONET DID NOT USE REMARK, BUT DID INCLUDE FINAL OBSERVATION THAT HIS COMMUNIST QUESTIONER HAD NEVER REFRAINED FROM DECLARING THAT HE WOULD LIKE TO SEE INFLUENCE OF DEMOCRACY AND DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM DIMINISH IN WESTERN EUROPE.

4. SAME MFA SOURCE ALSO DECLARED THAT BELGIUM IS IN NO POSITION TO MAKE STATEMENT SUCH AS WE HAD MADE, ADDING (NOT VERY HELPFULLY) THAT IF OUR STATEMENT WORKED, SO MUCH THE BETTER. NOTING BELGIUM'S CLOSE TIES WITH ITALIANS ("WE SEE THEM ALL THE TIME"), HE SAID THAT IS VERY HARD TO TELL MEMBERS OF THE SAME FAMILY WHAT TO DO. IN A SIMILAR EXCHANGE, AN MFA OFFICIAL WHO FOLLOWS ITALIAN AFFAIRS WAS NOTABLY RELAXED CONCERNING THE ITALIAN SITUATION. WE SHOULD WAIT AND SEE, HE SAID, AND ITALY, HE PROPHECIZED, WILL MUDDLE THROUGH. IN ANY CASE, BELGIUM, FRANCE AND PORTUGAL HAVE HAD COMMUNIST CABINET MINISTERS IN THE PAST AND WE HAVE ALL SURVIVED.

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5. WHILE THERE IS OBVIOUSLY CONCERN IN BELGIUM WITH WHAT IS VIVIDLY PORTRAYED IN THE MEDIA AS A DISINTEGRATING ITALIAN SOCIAL SYSTEM MARKED BY VIOLENCE AND CRIME, AND CONCERN THAT A CLOSE EUROPEAN PARTNER APPEARS TO BE DRIFTING TOWARD POLITICAL CHAOS, THERE IS CLEARLY NO DISCERNABLE ALARM AMONG BELGIANS, AND CERTAINLY NONE AT PRESENT AS FAR AS AN EVENTUALLY GREATER PCI ROLE IS CONCERNED.

6. WE ARE NOT AWARE THAT THE GOB, WITH ITS USUAL TENDENCY TO TAKE PROBLEMS AS THEY COME AND CURRENTLY PREOCCUPIED WITH LINGUISTIC, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS, HAS BEGUN TO FOCUS, FOR EXAMPLE, ON POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS FOR NATO OF COMMUNIST PARTICIPATION IN THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT. WHEN (AND IF) THE TIME COMES, HOWEVER, THE GOB UNDOUBTEDLY WOULD BE PREPARED TO WORK WITH ITS ALLIES IN NATO TO TRY TO LIMIT THE DAMAGES AS FAR AS MILITARY SECURITY IS CONCERNED.

7. WHATEVER THE GOB WOULD DO, IT WOULD DO ONLY IN CLOSE COORDINATION WITH ITS FRIENDS AND ALLIES,

WITH ITS EUROPEAN PARTNERS IN THE FIRST INSTANCE,
AND ALSO IN A NATO CONTEXT. IT WOULD NOT OCCUR TO
BELGIANS TO TRY TO INFLUENCE EVENTS BILATERALLY,
NOR WOULD THEY WISH TO PLAY AN ACTIVE ROLE
IN INITIATING ANY MULTILATERAL ACTION INVOLVING AN ALLY
AND FRIEND. AS SIMONET PUT IT, IN A TYPICALLY
PRUDENT AND MODEST BELGIAN WAY, EVEN TO COMMENT ON THE
DEPARTMENT'S STATEMENT WOULD NOT BE IN THE BELGIAN

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AMEMBASSY ROME
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TRADITION NOR CORRESPOND TO BELGIUM'S RESPONSIBILITIES
IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS.

8. THE SAME ATTITUDES ALSO WOULD APPLY TO ANY POSSIBLE
USE OF PARTY-TO-PARTY CHANNELS, WITH THE PARTIES
PREFERRING TO DEFER ANY ACTION TO BELGIUM'S COALITION
GOVERNMENT (IN WHICH MOST OF THEM ARE CURRENTLY
PARTICIPATING). WILFRIED MARTENS, PRESIDENT OF TINDE-
MANS' CHRISTIAN PARTY, REMARKED TO US RECENTLY, MOREOVER,
THAT HE AND HIS PARTY HAD TRIED REPEATEDLY WITHOUT
EFFECT TO PROD LEADERS OF THE FRATERNAL ITALIAN PARTY
TOWARD REFORM AND REVITALIZATION AND HAD DECIDED
THERE WAS LITTLE THAT COULD BE DONE BY BELGIANS.

9. TO THE LIMITED EXTENT THAT THE BELGIAN MEDIA HAS
FOCUSSED ON THE DEPARTMENT'S STATEMENT, MOST OF THE
COMMENT HAS BEEN NEGATIVE, INCLUDING THAT OF THE LEADING

INDEPENDENT CONSERVATIVE FLEMISH PAPER DE STANDARD ("A
GROSS INTERFERENCE IN THE DOMESTIC AFFAIRS OF ANOTHER
STATE") AND THE OFFICIAL SOCIALIST PRESS.

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10. GIVEN SUCH A CLIMATE OF OPINION, THE FACT THAT THE
SOCIALISTS ARE MAJOR PARTNERS IN THE GOVERNMENT, THE
APPARENTLY RELAXED ATTITUDE OF RESPONSIBLE BELGIAN
OFFICIALS, AND TRADITIONAL BELGIAN PRUDENCE, WE DOUBT
VERY MUCH THAT THE GOB WOULD RELISH THE PROSPECT OF
BEING ASKED TO HELP GRASP THIS PARTICULAR NETTLE. AT
LEAST AT THE CURRENT STAGE OF AFFAIRS, ALL THEIR
INCLINATIONS WOULD POINT THEM IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION.
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